

best practice



# THE NEW DIGITAL WAVE

[DIVE IN! WHITEBOARDS ARE QUICKLY CHANGING HOW WE TEACH]

Your classroom is next!  
Here's how to make the most  
of the new technology.

By Pamela Wheaton Shorr

**B**elieve it or not, there was a time when the chalkboard was revolutionary. Before it came along, teachers would walk from student to student, drawing problems on individual slates. (That made for a long day!) Now interactive whiteboards promise to reinvent instruc-

tion again, and many of you are taking up the challenge. Take 23-year veteran Kathleen Tkac, a math teacher at the Springside School in Philadelphia. She says her whiteboard "has revolutionized my teaching more than anything else in my career." Wow—but one teacher's revolution can be another's headache.

There's a learning curve in the beginning, of course. But if there's a whiteboard in your future or even one gathering dust in the corner, don't sweat it. Early users like Tkac swear they're worth the effort. We asked them to share tips that will have you trading in your chalk for a laser pointer.

## Throw Caution to the Wind

Mary Jo DeWitt, a fourth grade teacher at Allen County Intermediate Center in Kentucky, loves the interactive experience her whiteboard provides and its ability to expose her students to whole new worlds. For instance, she recently did a unit on the intertidal zone. "I've got kids who have never seen the ocean before," she notes, "but with the whiteboard they are hearing it, seeing it and labeling the salt marshes that they're seeing right in front of them."

The key to starting out, says DeWitt, is to overcome your fear of doing something wrong. "Trust that someone



# best practice

else will fix it if you break it!” she says. She advises newcomers to jump in with abandon. It’s the only way to experience all the features a whiteboard offers.

## Ask the Experts: Kids

When Philip M. Acosta, a fifth-grade teacher at Essex Fells School in Essex Fells, New Jersey, got his whiteboard he made it a point to take advantage of the school’s training sessions. They were wonderful and well worth it, he says. But they weren’t offered until two weeks into the school year, so he had to wing it for a while. His strategy was simple: When in doubt, hand it to a kid! “They can teach me things about it because it comes more naturally to them,” he says.

It’s also important that you communicate with your students and make sure you’re aware of what is working for them. Acosta suggests that as you experiment with lessons, you ask your students what they liked and disliked about how you’re using the technology. “Students don’t

want you to do the same old thing,” Acosta says, “but you do need to know whether using the board is helping them.”

## Dust Off Your Plan Book

It’s important to avoid thinking of a whiteboard as a glorified chalkboard, says Tkac. There is so much you can do with whiteboard technology, it is essential that you allow yourself to fall in love with teaching in a whole new way.

The first thing you’ll need to do is rethink the way you approach your material. “Start considering how motion can be used in your subject,” Tkac says. Working on a whiteboard is like conducting a symphony. You’re bringing in drag-and-drop collaborative writing and problem solving activities, then cueing up a film clip or bringing in the Internet to do research. There are many seemingly disparate functions and features, that when used together, create a holistic lesson.

“Whiteboard technology helps students visualize concepts,” Tkac says,

which is one of the biggest advantages over more traditional classroom presentation methods. For instance, Algebra II is all about the relationship between numbers, symbols and graphs. With the whiteboard, Tkac is able to overlay these elements and move them around. “That’s when kids start to ‘get it’ in ways they don’t when problems are simply laid out on paper,” she says.

Even the littlest math students can gain a clearer understanding of mathematical principles through whiteboards. Tkac lets younger kids “scoop” ice cream in an interactive ice cream shop, asking them to make as many two-scoop cones as possible. It doesn’t take long for kids to start asking whether the chocolate scoop should come first or second, and suddenly, you’ve got kids talking about mathematical order.

## Do Your Homework

Once you know what elements you want to bring into a lesson, you’ll need to take the time to prepare the whiteboard. If you’re planning on using a lot of written problems, type them in beforehand. Bookmark Web sites and download video clips that you’ll be pulling up, so you don’t have to go looking for them during class. The key is to get all your material gathered before class so that your time on the whiteboard will be about learning, and not wasted on the mechanics of the technology, says Tkac.

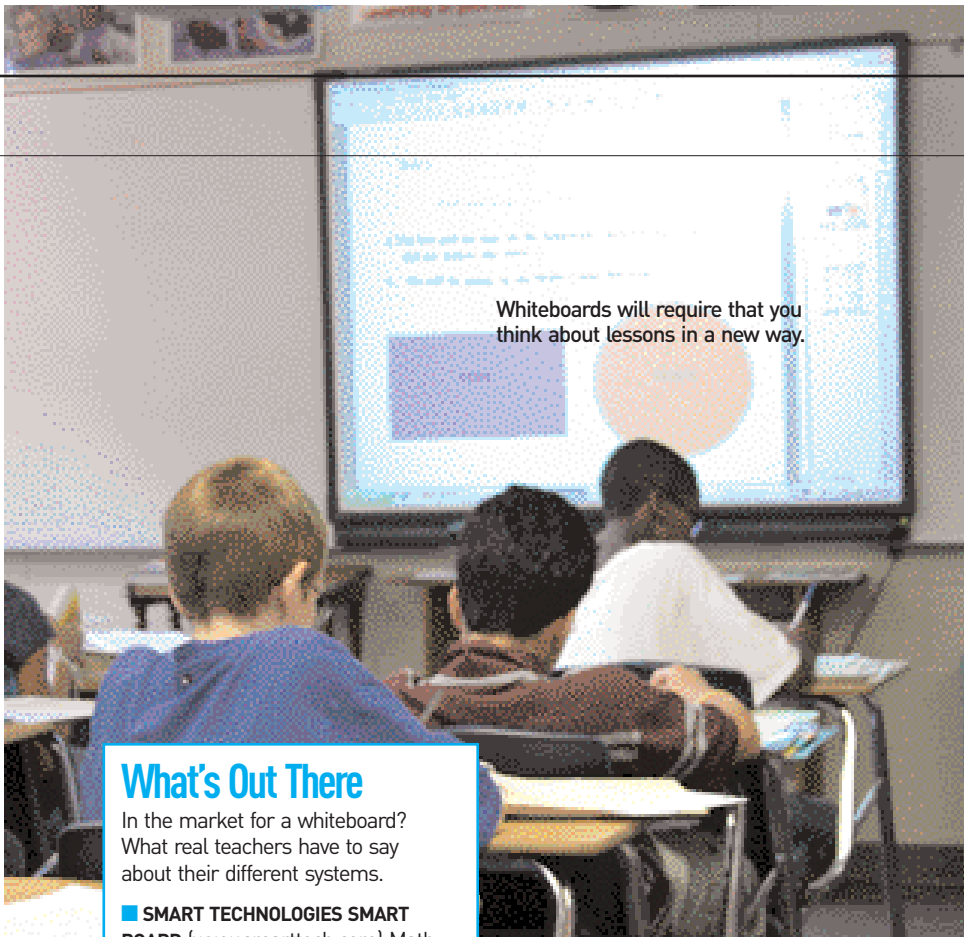
## Connect With the Class Clown

One upside of the whiteboard is the ability to personalize lessons with different learning styles in mind. “I am reaching every learner with this technology,” DeWitt says emphatically. Children who can’t sit still can work some energy out at the board. Other kids, such as those with physical limitations or ones who are desperately shy can participate in class as they manipulate the board from their seat with a wireless slate.

## Say Cheese! Add a Camera

Attaching a video camera to the whiteboard’s projector will allow you to display the output directly onto the

# 1/3 Square Left



Whiteboards will require that you think about lessons in a new way.

## What's Out There

In the market for a whiteboard? What real teachers have to say about their different systems.

### ■ SMART TECHNOLOGIES SMART

**BOARD** ([www.smarttech.com](http://www.smarttech.com)) Math teacher Kathleen Tkac says her SMART Board has revolutionized her teaching. "The best part is that it helps students visualize concepts."

### ■ PROMETHEAN PROACTIV

([www.prometheanworld.com](http://www.prometheanworld.com)) Fourth-grade teacher Mary Jo DeWitt says proACTIV is helping her reach every learner. Her wireless ACTIV Slate lets her move around the classroom while using the board.

### ■ GTCO CALCOMP INTERWRITE

([www.gtco.com](http://www.gtco.com)) Fifth-grade teacher Philip Acosta loves that he can put together a lesson and instantly save it. "It's great for when a child is sick or can't take notes in class."

whiteboard. Now, add a karaoke machine and a microphone and let kids choreograph their own musicals. It's a great way to get kids to be creative with book or social studies reports.

## Think Like A Designer

Your whiteboard can also influence the overall mood of the classroom. DeWitt suggests keeping classroom management in mind when choosing decorative elements. "Don't use yellow if you've got hyperactive or attention deficit kids," she

laughs. "Go for a nice soothing blue."

Use the whiteboard as a backdrop for presentations by projecting related artwork made by kids onto the board. Incorporating the screen into kids' presentations can keep the class focused.

## Plug Into The World

Once you've got the basics down, your options are virtually endless. With systems like United Streaming ([www.unitedstreaming.com](http://www.unitedstreaming.com)), an online educational digital video library with 4,000 videos and 40,000 video clips that can be accessed by registered users, you can make lessons multi-media with little effort. Kids will no longer assume that "movie day" is a free period.

## Don't Give Up—You'll Get It!

Don't forget, as you enter the world of whiteboards, to have patience. When your students struggle with new ideas and concepts you probably tell them to keep trying. Now it's time for you to take that advice. "It will take you a little time," Acosta admits. "But if you allow yourself to be creative with it, it will make you fall in love with your lessons all over again. You'll really enjoy what you're teaching." □

1/3

# Vertical Right